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26 May 1967

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

**SUBJECT: White House Meeting on Vietnam Politics**

25X1 1. On Thursday, 25 May, Dr. John Roche, Special Consultant to the President, convened a meeting in his office in the White House to discuss political developments in Vietnam and the posture the U.S. Government should adopt with regard to these developments. In addition to Dr. Roche the meeting was attended by Messrs. Philip Habib and Robert Miller of the Department of State and Messrs. Carver, Allen and [ ] of CIA. [ ] and Mr. Colby were unable to attend.)

2. Mr. Roche opened by stating that the President, Mr. Walt Rostow and he were extremely concerned about the course of political developments in Vietnam, particularly the burgeoning rivalry between Ky and Thieu, whose conflicting presidential ambitions could fracture the unity of the military establishment so essential to continued political progress in South Vietnam. Mr. Roche had been requested by the President and Mr. Rostow to review this matter with knowledgeable U.S. Government officials to determine an optimum course of U.S. action.

3. An hour's lively discussion of Vietnamese politics followed Mr. Roche's opening remarks. From it there emerged general agreement on the following points:

a) The Thieu-Ky rivalry is serious and has raised grave potential problems with regard to the political situation. As of this moment, however, the threat is potential but not yet realized. There are signs of stress within the military, but as yet no signs of split.

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b) The U.S. Government must be prepared to move fast but must also avoid acting with undue haste. If we intervene before intervention is necessary (e.g., tell Thieu not to run) we will lose more than we stand to gain. Any person whom we support (e.g., Ky) will be tagged as a U.S. puppet. His opponents, at a minimum, will be disgruntled and might even pull out of the electoral race, thus destroying its political and image-building value.

c) For the time being, the best posture for Ambassador Bunker to take officially, and for others with access to the principal players to take unofficially, is that the U.S. Government expects the Vietnamese Government (i.e., Thieu and Ky) to live up to the commitment made many times (including to the President at Guam) that the military establishment will remain united and will not split on the rock of conflicting personal ambitions. Making our pitch in this impersonal fashion saves face and keeps open our options. It precludes our having to choose between Thieu and Ky.

d) It is essential that we keep our ears open and develop pipelines to all the principal players. Events are moving with considerable speed and we must stay abreast of them so we will know at once if and when the moment arrives when we must intervene.

4. A State Department cable had already been drafted along the above lines, was discussed at the meeting, and subsequently sent (after some modification) as State 202559 (copy attached).

5. There was considerable discussion about the role the Agency can play in keeping the U.S. Government's ear to the ground. Mr. Habib felt that full use should be made of Colonel Miller's contacts and informal relationships. I assured him that, subject to Ambassador Bunker's control and direction, this would indeed be done.

George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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